



Aruba's Youth Hotline celebrates its seventh anniversary with a gift to the youth

On Monday, November 20, Fundacion Telefon Pa Hubentud Aruba, or Youth Hotline held a symposium in the Beach Tower of the Renaissance Resort in Oranjestad. The symposium was in honor of the International Day of Children and also the seven years that the hotline has provided their service to Aruba's youth. Various individuals involved with the hotline, and childcare professionals spoke to the gathering, which also had the purpose of introducing two informative "spiekboekjes" about understanding and handling the sexual changes of the teenage years.

The Youth Hotline, telephone #131, provides professional help every afternoon, and on weekends. Any child can call about any problem and receive support and information about what to do and where to turn, not only if they are having a problem in the home, but if they are not getting the answers from their parents. This was an important message during Monday's symposium, the need for parents to be more communicative and aware of what may be troubling their children. The various speakers, beginning with Hellen van der Wall, voorzitter of the Youth Hotline, emphasized this message repeatedly.

Ms. Van der Wall cited information presented in the "United Nations Secretary General's Study on Violence against Children, under the guidance of professor Paulo Pinheiro and recently presented in Geneva. The statistics were alarming, and growing. She also recited professor Pinheiro's conclusions, in that "no violence against children can be justified; all violence against children can and must be prevented. A multidimensional approach, grounded in human rights and principles and evidence-based research is urgently needed to prevent and respond to violence in all circumstance." A further finding by the Union of One states "Children are tired of being called our future. Children are tired of words and no action. They want to enjoy their childhood free of violence-now."

Additionally making presentations to the gathering about the consequences of abuse to our children were Director of the Youth Hotline, Madeline Doulabi-Ridderstap, and Lesli Jacobs-Williams, a psychologist with the Social Services. Charisse Hoen-Daly, Director of the Casa Cuna Progreso, spoke of what care specialists have to deal with when working with abused children. The Casa Cuna Progreso is the care facility for children from infancy to seven years, that are taken from troubled homes by the social services.

Jairus Barry, President of the Aruba Youth Parliament, also stepped to the podium to speak on behalf of island youth and offer thanks to the work of the Youth Hotline. He thanked them for not only in being there to help when youth is troubled, but in their ongoing efforts to provide education and materials to inform and assist young people in their struggle to adulthood.

In the month of October alone, the hotline received 155 calls asking questions about teenage sexuality, aside from the other 183 calls with various questions or pleas for assistance. From the experience of the volunteers of the Youth Hotline, they reached the conclusion that an easy to understand and informative book on teenage sexuality was needed. Two small books were printed, one for females and one for males, looking at the question of sexuality from each viewpoint, as each has different attitudes, concerns and consequences to face for irresponsible behavior. In these times, not only is the issue of teenage pregnancy a strong concern and consequence of not practicing "safe sex," but any number of diseases, including many that are incurable, and of course AIDS, which is deadly. Today's youth have many daunting issues to face while trying to handle their developing sexuality. For more information on obtaining materials and the new books, individuals and groups can call the hotline, #131, or their offices at #588-6138 or 588-4011; or e-mail telhubentud@setarnet.aw.